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ABSTRACT

Taiwan's effort to provide a compulsory ninth grade education for its citizens has led to a 700 percent increase in the number of schools since 1950, reflecting a tremendous effort by the Taiwan government to provide public education, in their belief that an educated populace is the secret to a nation's success. While there is a noticeable lack of librarians, television, and audiovisual equipment in the junior middle schools, elementary schools feature offerings such as school dental offices, free lunches, Chinese opera instruction, Kung Fu instruction, and Little League baseball. Upon completion of ninth grade, 20 percent enter the job market, with the majority entering commercial or vocational schools to facilitate Taiwan's continued industrial growth. Unfortunately, only the small percentage of ninth graders who pass rigorous exams attend high school, with only 25 percent of these qualifying for college in Taiwan's 9 universities, 17 colleges, and 76 junior colleges. Taiwanese high schools offer scholarships and government subsidization with military training required as part of the curriculum. Post high school education might include Chinese Opera School, Taiwan Normal University for teacher training, or officer's candidate schools. Emphasis is placed on ethics and morality as well as subject matter and strict adherence to dress codes and the lack of vandalism reflect the discipline and respect for authority found in Taiwan's schools. In conclusion, Taiwan's booming economy is indicative of the Taiwan government's success in meeting their nation's educational needs. (LH)

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TAIWAN RISES TO INCREASED-LITERACY
CHALLENGE WITH 700 PERCENT GROWTH IN
NUMBER OF SCHOOLS
by

Ray L. Anderton

I had the opportunity to visit an elementary and secondary school in Taiwan when I was visiting the Republic of China as a teacher on an academic voyage co-sponsored by the University of Colorado and the Institute for Shipboard Education. To arrange the school visits, I simply went to the government-run tourist office in Keelung, a port city in northern Taiwan and explained that I was an educator from the United States. A chauffeur, interpreter, and reporter met me at my ship and took me to the office of the District Inspector of Schools. The five of us got into the car and after a short drive, we arrived at the flower-filled courtyard of a white stuccoed, junior middle school in Keelung. The school was large, three-storied, and U-shaped. The principal and his dean of students, waiting in the patio to greet us in a drizzling rain, escorted our entourage to his office.

It was a huge room more than 40 feet long, furnished with a big oak desk, comfortable couches, and straight-backed chairs. A massive window dominating the room framed a view of green hills and distant mountains. I noticed an American flag standing next

to the Taiwanese flag and wondered if it had been brought out in my honor?

Again I was asked why I wanted to see the schools. Again I told them that as an educator I was interested in schools. As I asked questions through the interpreter, people bustled about the office. A projector and a screen were set up, literature was spread before me, and tea was served. I settled back to watch a film about education in Taiwan.

Revolution under way

After viewing the film, scanning the literature, and asking many questions, I realized that a real revolution had been taking place in the Taiwanese schools.

My hosts were proud of the schools and seemed pleased that I was interested in their achievements. Since 1950, they told me, the number of schools has increased 700 percent. Primary education has become Taiwan's biggest business. Just 12 years ago, most children left school after six years, and to get a really sound education many children attended private elementary schools. In 1968 the government began to offer nine years' free schooling to every child. By 1976, 85 percent of the nation's children finished the ninth grade, and today that number has risen to 99.9 percent. While I pondered those statistics, we began our tour.

Everyone came along on the tour. I was amazed because as we passed classroom after classroom not a child glanced our way. Everyone appeared to be absorbed in what he was doing. I looked in the empty music room and was surprised to see the western

faces of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mozart. I was impressed anew of the universality of music. How I wished I could have heard the children sing. The principal claimed they were very good.

Unlike most library media centers in the U.S. schools, the library was empty. They had no librarian. They had no staff. Each teacher is responsible for bringing his class to the library and getting his own materials. No audiovisual materials were in evidence and television is not used as a teaching medium even though Taiwan has an excellent television network.

The only classrooms in which I observed animated activity were the science room and the gymnasium. Groups in the science class were experimenting with lamps, wires, and dry cell batteries. In the gym, the principal interrupted the games the children were playing to have them put on a jump-rope exhibition. He said that the school had taken first place in island competition.

With one or two commands the gym floor was cleared and I witnessed the best jump-rope talent in Taiwan. The students began with a single rope and ended with five ropes and two jumpers blending into one beautifully coordinated display. I have a feeling that if Taiwan ever sends a jump-rope team to the U.S. we'll be in trouble.

After the visit to the gym, we walked to the car, said our goodbyes, and headed down the twisting, narrow road to an elementary school. The driver negotiated wild drivers, carts, bicycles, and pedestrians with great finesse and we arrived

without incident.

Elementary school

Our greeting at the elementary school was just as impressive as that at the junior middle school. By this time the rain had stopped, but the principal and his assistant were waiting in the courtyard. We went inside for tea and questions.

After we had chatted for a few minutes, we were taken on tour. I was intrigued by a monkey in a cage at one end of the yard which I took for their version of a hamster. There was a group of children practicing Kung Fu at the other end. Although this school was just an elementary school, it was noted for its interest and instruction in Chinese opera.

We walked through the classrooms and *deja vu*! I could have been in any elementary school in the U.S. The walls were adorned with children produced posters. The topics were varied just as they are here.

I was surprised to see what looked like a dentist's office. When I asked about it, I was told that every child has a dental check up twice each year and that a dental technician is employed to check the children's teeth. Once each week a dentist comes to the school to take care of the more serious cases. The Taiwanese government looks after its children.

We passed the kitchen area. Two very large stainless steel bowls about four feet in diameter stood in the open aired kitchen. Each was placed on a set of gears so that it could be tipped easily without it tipping completely over. I learned that every child gets a free lunch. No child is allowed to be hungry.

Room monitors come to the area at lunch time and bring bowls of rice and other foods to each room.

After receiving more literature and asking a few more questions, we took our leave of these very gracious people and made our way back to city hall to the Offices of Education.

I was prepared to thank my hosts and leave but learned that I was invited to meet the district superintendent. His offices were on the top of the city hall.

Apparently, I was through asking questions, for the superintendent began questioning me about schools in the U.S. He was curious about our curriculum and administrative style. He then asked me what I thought of Keelung's schools. I could only respond that what I had seen was impressive. He seemed pleased. As we shook hands, I thanked him and my escorts for being so hospitable and we said goodbye.

Back at the ship, I began to read and to think about what I had read and seen. What the Taiwan government had done in a relatively short time was nothing less than impressive. Here are some of the additional facts I learned.

Preschool and kindergarten

Pre-school and Kindergarten schools are becoming more numerous. Traditionally, children from ages 2 - 6 were ignored as far as a formal education was concerned. Now as more women enter the labor market, pre-schools are becoming more important and many young mothers are taking their children to organized pre-schools which began teaching socialization skills, moved to arts and crafts and now includes some language skills and

arithmetic. The government is supervising the training and credentialing of teachers and administrators and taking an interest in the location and construction of facilities.

Problems encountered

The problems faced by the government in providing nine years of education instead of six were tremendous. To assure a junior middle school (grades seven, eight, and nine) in each district, 200 new schools were built in just a few years and thousands of classrooms were added to existing schools. There were not enough teachers or administrators. College and universities were ordered to add education courses to back up the training programs of normal schools. Of necessity, during this transition period quantity was stressed over quality.

Now that buildings and teaching manpower have caught up with demand, the emphasis is being moved back to quality. Teachers are required to take extra courses to make up training deficiencies. Half-day sessions have been eliminated. The size of classes has been reduced to about 40 children per teacher. New classes have been added in arts and vocations. Laboratories have been built for the teaching of natural and physical sciences. Physical education is no longer limited to calisthenics and now includes team sports.

Almost every Taiwan primary school has a Little League baseball team. Taiwan sends a team to the Little League World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania every year. The District Inspector was both proud and embarrassed when he reminded me that Taiwan has won the Series almost every year since 1969.

While all children are required to finish ninth grade, most are discouraged from continuing academic education beyond the junior middle school. About 20 percent quit school and enter the job market after ninth grade. The majority of the others are accepted only into commercial or vocational schools.

This is a new trend. A decade ago, most students who continued their education went to academic senior high schools which were geared to preparing them for college matriculation. Today the ratio is seven to four in favor of vocational schools. There is a practical reason for this change, although it was played down by my hosts.

The government is encouraging the young people to attend vocational schools to gain the special skills that are needed for Taiwan's continued industrial growth. Taiwan urgently needs technicians and skilled craftsmen. Some of the vocational schools are attached to industries or have training arrangements with them. Through the vocational school new manpower can be channeled into Taiwan's ever-expanding industries.

I learned by reading between the lines that there have been no successful anti-sexist movements in the schools. In the upper grades the classes are segregated by sex, and when entering vocational high schools the girls flow automatically into the home economics, nursing, and midwifery institutions while the boys are sent to technical, agricultural, or marine and fishery schools.

Admitted on merit

From what I could learn, admission to high school is based

solely on merit. Boy or girl, rich or poor, the only way to win acceptance into a public high school is by passing a grueling two-day examination given at the end of ninth grade. The competitive exam determines not only which students will be allowed to continue their academic education, but also which high schools the government will assign them to: the higher the grade, the more prestigious the school.

For the small percentage who pass the examination, tuition charges are moderate and some scholarships are provided. Board and room are also available at an affordable cost. A lack of money will not keep a bright, hard-working child from getting an education. This represents a major change, for in the past most high school students were the children of wealthy parents.

The high school curriculum is very demanding, and pressures on the students are high. Adding to the tension is the knowledge that at the end of their three-year high school career only one-fourth will pass the exam that will allow them to enter one of Taiwan's colleges.

The high schools are in session six days a week and the school day is long—from 7:30 until 4:30—followed by many hours of homework. For the first year all students take the same courses. Juniors and seniors may specialize in either the natural and physical sciences or the social sciences, but within those fields of study all courses are required—there are no elective choices. Students are asked which of the two specializations they prefer, but aptitudes are taken into consideration and they may find their requests overruled..

Students spend one school day each week in military training. They take it very seriously. With the United States ending the mutual defense treaty and Peking refusing to swear off the use of force against Taiwan, the government feels it is necessary to arm the children to strengthen the island's defense. Students learn to clean and fire rifles, practicing on military firing ranges. Besides studying weaponry, they learn to identify war planes, practice marching, and study first aid. All school children from the primary grades through high school wear uniforms. The boys wear solid-colored shirts and plain short or long pants, and the girls wear tailored blouses and loose-fitting skirts, each school having its own colors. No school child has long hair. Boys' hair is very short and even the girls may not wear their hair longer than ear length. Some teachers measure students' hair daily.

Ethics, morals stressed

My hosts told me that at all grade levels emphasis is placed on ethics and morality as well as subject matter. Young people are taught to get along with each other and to respect their teachers. The schools demand order and discipline--and get it! The students stand and bow whenever a teacher enters a room. They also stand when called on to answer questions. The children themselves do not ask questions. They accept what the teacher says, never challenging a teacher's word.

Vandalism is not a problem in Taiwanese schools, nor is littering. Perhaps that is in part because the children are the ones who maintain the schools. They sweep the floors and halls,

scrub the bathrooms, clean the blackboards, and straighten their rows of desks at the end of each school day. Involvement seems to help.

Special schools

It is the dream of every child in Taiwan who is artistically inclined to be accepted into the Chinese Opera School which admits carefully selected students from all over the island. Children undergo a rigid examination to gain admittance and only a few of the hundreds applying each year get into the school. If they are admitted, they enter at the age of eight and graduate when they are eighteen. No one is admitted at a later age. One must begin early to become a star in Taiwan.

As you may imagine, the schedule is rigorous. The children arise early, go to class all day and then study after the evening meal. Kung Fu, fighting with ancient weapons, acting, singing, musical instruments, painting masks, character study, and traditional subjects make up the curriculum.

Are the rewards worth this kind of dedication? Yes, because this is the process that chooses the future stars of stage, screen and television. Every child has visions of becoming a star and what many of us here in the U.S. do not realize is that Hollywood is not the only place where movies are made. It is big business in Taiwan.

Two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities

For many Taiwanese, education does not stop with a high school education. There are 9 universities, 17 colleges and 76 junior colleges. Two-thirds of them are private. One

outstanding example of a private university is Fu Jen Catholic University which specializes in languages. Tuition is \$250 per semester a large amount for their economy. There are three public universities, National Taiwan University, Chengchi University and Tsing Hua University.

In days past students who could afford it, or showed exceeding promise were sent abroad for their education. Now, most students now stay home because the quality of education has so improved. Tuition is low, in public schools, and may even be subsidized. Board and room are cheap. However, it is still very difficult to gain admittance. Only the best gain entrance.

Teacher training

The leader in teacher training is National Taiwan Normal University. While it specializes in general teacher training, other colleges offer technical education for those who wish to enter those fields.

During the crash program to upgrade the number of schools and teachers other schools and universities were mandated to educate and train teachers. Now, schools are working with quality in favor of quantity. During the build up period emphasis was placed on the basics, but now all subjects are taught.

Officers' candidate schools

Because of the immediate threat of their neighbor to the north, Taiwan is building an elite military officers' corps. Surprisingly all of those who take the course do not become officers in the military. I learned that at the end of the course work there is a very stiff exam. Fifty percent are washed

out and must spend the rest of their military time in the ranks of enlisted personnel. Quite a come down for a college graduate who wanted to become an officer.

Summary

The Taiwan government has put a lot of time, money and effort in building a responsive, responsible and productive educational system. At the present time they are meeting their own educational needs whether professional, skilled or semi-skilled in their own system. The planners believed that an educated populace is the secret to a nation's success. If one can judge by the booming economy that is Taiwan's today, that assumption has proved to be correct.